

## The Role of Genre in Teaching Writing

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### Abstract

Kemampuan menulis merupakan salah satu kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang harus dikuasai bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris. Untuk menguasai kemampuan ini, seorang guru perlu menggunakan beragam metode. Setiap metode mempunyai kelebihan dan kekurangannya tersendiri. Dalam artikel ini dianalisis dua metode yang biasa digunakan dalam pengajaran kemampuan menulis yakni *grammar instruction* dan *genre-based instruction*. Di dalam artikel ini, empat penelitian yang berhubungan dengan *grammar instruction* dan empat penelitian yang berhubungan *genre-based instruction* dianalisis secara mendalam. Kelebihan dan kekurangan dari setiap metode dielaborasi untuk mendapatkan informasi metode yang tepat dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa. Di dalam artikel ini *genre-based instruction* mempunyai peran yang lebih baik dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** *genre, genre-based instruction, grammar instruction, writing skill*

### A. Introduction

Writing is one of the skills that should be mastered by English Language Learners. There are several methods or instructions that are used to teach writing for ELL. After analyzing four studies that discuss teaching writing using grammar instruction (Fearn & Farnan, 2007; Kim, 2010; Macaro & Mastermann, 2006; Myhill, 2005) and four studies that discuss genre-based instruction (Beck & Jeffery, 2009; Chen & Su, 2012; Myskow & Gordon, 2010; and Yasuda, 2011), I can say that genre-based instruction has greater role in enhancing students' writing skills. In this position paper, I will define the two instructions, mention the strengths and weaknesses of the

two methods, and explain the arguments to support the fact that genre based-instruction has bigger role to teaching writing than grammar instruction.

### **B. The Definition**

In this part, I will briefly describe the definition and the purpose of grammar instruction and genre-based instruction.

Grammar instruction is teaching grammar explicitly for certain purpose (Fear & Farnan, 2007; Macaro & Mastermann, 2006). The aim is to develop grammar knowledge that can be applied in specific context (Fear & Farnan, 2007). The context can be writing essay or IDD (identification, description, and definition). The stages of the instruction can be various, but in general, there are two stages; the explanation of grammar knowledge or elements and writing practice (Fear & Farnan, 2007; Macaro & Mastermann, 2006).

Meanwhile, genre-based instruction is teaching learners to develop the purpose, the audience, and the organization of the texts (Halliday, 2004). The aim is to help students to understand the function, the structures, and the language use of many kinds of genre (Chen & Su, 2012; Yasuda, 2011). There are many kinds of stages that are used to implement this instruction, and all of them emphasize on teacher-supported learning and peer interaction (Hyland, 2007). One example of the stages are presented by Hyland (2007) (cited in Chen & Su, 2012); they are setting the context, modeling, joint construction, independent construction, and comparison.

### **C. Strengths**

There are some strengths that can be found in grammar instruction and genre-based instruction. In grammar instruction, there are three strengths that can be mentioned. First, the instruction helps learners to use various linguistic choices as meaning-making resources which the function is to create relationships with the reader (Myhill, 2005). By creating this relationship, writing can function as communicative act and be useful to deliver message. Second, the instruction can improve the principle of connectivity. That means learners can make connection between what they write and

how they write it (Myhill, 2005). Grammar elements support learners to write everything accurately with the ideas they have. It is important since a slight mistake in creating sentence creates different meaning. Third, grammar instruction helps learners to produce structured task such as identification, definition, and description (Fearn & Farnan, 2007). In those tasks, learners can create writing that has specific function; to identify, to define, and to describe.

In genre-based instruction, at least there are three strengths that can be found. First, it helps students to understand the content, organization, vocabulary, and language use of the texts (Chen & Su, 2012). That means the learner will be able to create communicative writing using appropriate vocabulary and structures in certain context. Second, it helps learners to create particular kinds of writing and differentiate kinds of writing from one another (Yasuda, 2011). That means learners will be able to recognize the characteristics of many genres and differentiate one to another. Last, it helps learners to create useful writing that can be applied directly to real context (Myskow & Gordon, 2010).

#### **D. Weaknesses**

Beside strengths, there are also weaknesses in both instructions. In grammar instruction, the weaknesses are; first, this instruction only focuses on transcribing and encoding thoughts into words (Myhill, 2005). Its main purpose is only to create the accurate sentence for specific thought. Second, this instruction does not develop the relationship between writing and social context. It does not emphasize the importance of connection between the function of writing and real world context. Third, the instruction is more focus on the development of grammar knowledge instead of writing knowledge (Fearn & Farnan, 2007). There is no support on developing the organization or structure of writing, but it only focuses on how sentences are constructed. Fourth, this instruction leads the accuracy of elements in grammar tests but not in composition or writing since it only focuses on the relationship of sentences not on the whole aspects of writing (Macaro & Mastermann, 2006). The last, the instruction does not emphasize the difference between kinds of writing to another.

There are also some weaknesses in genre-based instruction. First, it does not give much attention in grammatical issue since it more focuses on creating writing that functions in social purpose. Second, this instruction does not give opportunity for the students to develop idea and opinion since it focuses more on the organizations and key features of each text (Beck & Jeffery, 2009). The last, it takes a lot of time to implement this instruction since, for each kind of writing, there are several stages that have to be accomplished.

### **E. Genre-Based Instruction versus Grammar Instruction**

Based on the purpose, the stages of instruction, the strengths and the weaknesses, I assume that genre-based instruction has more influence in the development of writing skills than grammar instruction. I will compare some elements that occur in genre-based instruction but not in grammar instruction based on the explanation above.

First element is language use and vocabulary. Genre-based instruction helps learners to understand the content, language use and vocabulary (Chen & Su, 2012). In genre-based instruction, the teacher will introduce learners to many kinds of genres and their characteristics. Those characteristics include the grammatical pattern and the common expression. For example, the grammatical pattern that is used in narrative texts is simple past tense and the common phrase is 'once upon a time'. It is different with grammar instruction that only focus on explicit grammatical pattern and not on the characteristic of specific writing (Fearn & Farnan, 2007). The problem will occur when learners should differentiate between narrative texts and recount texts which have same grammatical pattern. In this case, genre-based instruction is better because it does not only introduce the grammatical pattern but also the specific language of different writing.

Second is structure and organization. In genre-based instruction, the teacher will introduce the structure of many kinds of writing which is different one another. This will help learners to identify the main organization and the division of writing (Chen & Su, 2012). Organization is very important since it will determine the cohesion and the coherence of the writing (Weshah & Tomok, 2011). However, in grammar

instruction, the organization of writing is not considered since it more concerns on how sentences are constructed (Fearn & Farnan, 2007). The emphasis is only on the transcription of what in mind to construct a paragraph (Kim, 2010). In fact, the structure of writing is very important since it will help reader to understand the general idea when they begin to read and guess what comes next. More importantly, the structure of writing determines the characteristic of certain writing, so that the reader can recognize the type of writing.

Third is social purpose or social context. Myskow & Gordon (2010) mentions a genre helps students to improve writing that can be used to fulfill social purpose. Furthermore, Yasuda (2011) states that genre-based approach develops students' ability of language use in certain context. From those two statements, it can be concluded that genre supports learner to create writing that can be used in social contexts. In this instruction, the teacher will create setting where genre can be applied directly in real world. For example, students will write application letter based on vacancy in newspaper. In my perspective, it is very important because writing will be useful if it can be used in real world. Writing is not merely act of transcribing and encoding thoughts but it is a social practice that is influenced by social, cultural, and historical context (Myhill, 2005). On the contrary, grammar instruction does not provide this. As mentioned earlier that the purpose of this instruction is to create sentences using set of fix rules based on what in mind. In this case, this instruction does not guarantee that the produced writing can be used in social context.

Fourth is the type of writing. Beck & Jeffery (2009) states that genre in teaching writing emphasizes the importance of helping students to understand the structures that differentiate texts from one another. Since there are many kinds of writing, it is important for the learners to be able to distinguish many types of writing. In the last stage of genre-based instruction, learners should compare between the texts that they have learned with another texts. By doing this, the learners will get deeper understanding in recognizing the characteristic of texts. It is significant stage since it proves the learners' understanding about main characteristics of the texts. If they are able to distinguish kinds of writing, that means they have mastered the structures and

the organization of each text or writing. On the other hand, grammar instruction does not provide this element. Instead of introducing types of writing, this instruction only introduces types of verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (Fearn & Farnan, 2007).

The last element is the importance of scaffolding (teacher-supported learning) and collaboration (peer interaction). Hyland (2007) mentions that genre-based instruction emphasizes on the support that teachers give to the students during the creation writing and the importance of collaborative learning between students. It is very important elements because writing is quite difficult skill to learn since the students have to produce something by combining many elements in English. With the support of the teachers and collaboration of peers, learners will be motivated and they can accomplish many tasks easily. On the other hand, some modification of grammar instruction also implements this practice, but it does not really emphasize teacher-supported learning (Kim, 2010). It only gives opportunity for the students to work together to finish the task.

## **F. Conclusion**

After comparing the two instructions, I can say that genre-based instruction has greater role in teaching writing than grammar instruction since it does not only focus on language feature or structure but also the purpose and the organization of the texts. Furthermore, genre also helps students to create purposeful text that can be used in social context.

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